## Unit .35

## Session .04

# Obeying from Love

### Scripture

## 1 John 2:1-6

**1** My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one. **2** He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world. **3** This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. **4** The one who says, "I have come to know him," and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. **5** But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: **6** The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.

# Intro Options

**Main Point:**
**The gospel motivates us to love and obey God.**

## Option 1

Your students should pretend they work for a Christian youth magazine or social media channel. They have just received the following question from a reader/viewer: "If Jesus already died for my sins, why should I bother obeying His commands?" Your students should come up with an answer. Their answer could take the form of a talking head (think YouTube), a drawing or picture with a caption of explanation (think Instagram), a little rhyme or poem (think Twitter), or something else entirely.

See what motivations they provide. Point out that we can have extrinsic motivations (we do things because of what will happen to us) or intrinsic motivations (we do things because of what we feel inside). In today's session, we'll see that Christians obey from intrinsic motivations. The Lord has given us new hearts that know, trust, and love God. So, we obey Him not out of duty or for fear of consequence, but because we love Him and are totally confident that He lovingly knows what is best for us.

## Option 2

Once you have compiled your list, have students get into small groups. Each group should pick one relationship from the list. They must now create two scenarios. In both scenarios, the authority figure asks their underling to do something; moreover, in both scenarios, the authority guarantees their underling there will be no negative consequences regardless of whether the underling obeys or not. In the first scenario, the underling chooses not to obey (after all, there will be no negative consequences for disobedience); in the second, the underling chooses to obey. Examples might be doing some evening chores, or completing an extra duty, or running a drill. Have students prepare and put on the two scenarios.

Afterward, discuss what made the difference between the two scenarios. Why do some people use love as an excuse to pursue their own passions, while others go "all-in" when they are loved? What makes the difference? Chances are good the right motivation will be intrinsic trust in the authority figure: a love for him or her, knowing he or she only wants what is best, etc.

In today's session, we'll see that God's love compels us to obey: we are like the second scenario, totally "bought-in" to God's plan because we trust Him, because we remember what He has done, because we know Him, and because we love Him.

# TEACHING PLAN

## Read 1 John 2:1-2.

In the preceding verses, John said that God is light and has no darkness in Him at all (1:5). So, if we continue to live in open and defiant sin, we do not truly have an active relationship with God (1:6). And yet, if we claim that we are sinless, then we are liars who also do not know God (1:8-10). He said all of this because he doesn't want us to live in sin (v. 1), but He also doesn't want us to despair when we do sin. We have an advocate before God who has covered our sins (vv. 1-2).

- **What do you feel when you hear that Jesus is your advocate before God?**

The greatest sense of relief you could feel should be sensed as you read these verses. We all sin, and we know that we sin. We know that we fall short. But when you know that God the Son is your advocate, there is nothing to fear. The highest Judge is also your Defender. The righteous One, who eternally has the ear of the Father, speaks on your behalf.

- **How is Jesus able to advocate for us despite our sin?**

"He himself is the atoning sacrifice" (v. 2). When we sin, Jesus doesn't excuse it or try to downplay it. He doesn't shift blame. No, Jesus is righteous. He can't do such things. But for every failure and shortcoming in us, Jesus stands before the Father and says, "I paid for that." When Satan brings accusation after accusation, Jesus says, "I paid for that." Nothing sticks because the Judge, Attorney, and Substitute are one, and they say together, "Not guilty."

## Read 1 John 2:3-4.

John wanted his readers to know where they stood with God. He wanted to help true Christians experience a deeper assurance, and his words simultaneously also undid any false assurance some may have had. Of course, the greatest assurance comes from faith that Jesus has indeed paid for your sins and is your advocate before God (2:1-2). But that isn't the only source of assurance.

- **According to John, how can we know that we have a relationship with God?**

Assurance comes less from a past experience and more from a present walk with God. We rarely doubt our salvation when we are walking closely with God. It's when we are wandering away and entangled in sin that we struggle with our assurance. Although we are not saved by works, our salvation is revealed through our works: "This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands" (v. 3).

- **According to John, what comes first—knowing God or obeying Him?**

It may seem subtle, but it is a significant distinction to make. How can we be sure that we know God? We obey Him (v. 3). What shows that someone does not know God? They say they know Him, but don't keep His commands (v. 4). Notice how knowing God comes before obeying. We obey out of the overflow of a relationship with God, not in order to gain a relationship with God. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul told Christians that they should live holy lives, unlike "the Gentiles, who don't know God" (1 Thess. 4:4-5). He believed that living for God resulted from knowing Him, and the apostle John did, too. We must know God in order to obey Him. To reverse the order would be to undermine the gospel.

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**The gospel motivates us to love and obey God.**

## 1 John 2:1-2

"Jesus is now in the Father's presence as the eternal High Priest, who, having atoned for the sins of his people, now stands as their effective Advocate to ensure that their sins do not disqualify them from fellowship with the Father… Fellowship with God is possible because the sins that caused offense to God have been removed through Jesus' atoning sacrifice, so that God's wrath no longer abides on those who have fled for refuge in the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."[1]

"The ultimate problem that all human beings face is that God's omnipotent wrath is against them. The ultimate good news is that there is a way to have the wrath of God averted—and that God himself has made the way… God is not content to leave all people under his wrath. Nor can he simply sweep sin under the rug of the universe. Therefore, his love and his justice conspire to make a way for sinners to be saved and God's justice to be vindicated. The answer is the death of Jesus Christ."[2]

## 1 John 2:3-4

"Holiness of life is the best proof that we know God. It matters not how readily we can speak about God, nor how much we suppose that we love him; the great test is, do we keep his commandments? What a heart-searching test this is! How it should humble us before the mercy-seat!"[3]

"The New Testament does not offer a lot of encouragement for people who just want enough Christianity to be saved."[4]

*1. Daniel L. Akin, 1,2,3 John: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2001).*
*2. John Piper, "Jesus Christ Is an Advocate for Sinners," Desiring God, February 10, 1985, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/jesus-christ-is-an-advocate-for-sinners.*
*3. Charles Spurgeon, "1 John 2 Commentary - Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible," StudyLight.org, 2011, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/spe/1-john-2.html.*
*4. Don Carson, Twitter post, October 1, 2020, 7:32 p.m., https://twitter.com/MattSmethurst/status/1311826351637364737*

## 99 Essential Doctrines (p. 64, DDG)

### 59. Christ as Propitiation

Because of God's righteousness and holiness, humanity's sins must be atoned for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's death is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's wrath against sin. Christ's propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God's great love toward sinners (1 John 4:10) as well as the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).

# TEACHING PLAN

**Read 1 John 2:5-6.**

John wanted these Christians to obey God and not live in sin (2:1), but the obedience he had in mind was not from begrudging obligation. Remember when your parents would make you tell someone, "I'm sorry," and you said it in a tone that was completely insincere? Your lips were saying one thing, while your attitude was communicating another. That's not the kind of obedience that shows that we know God. As Paul told the Galatians, "what matters is faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

## ▪ How does love motivate obedience?

When you love someone, you want to do things that please them. You want to serve and honor them. True love demonstrates itself in action. If someone says they love you, but they ignore you, don't care about how you feel, and live selfishly, do they really love you? Of course not. And the same is true of our relationship with God. If we say we love Him but do not obey His commands, or even care to, we do not have a relationship with God.

## ▪ How is Jesus the greatest example of obedience and love?

Jesus is the perfect embodiment of law and love. He lived in perfect obedience to His Father's will and fulfilled the law. His works demonstrated that He was truly from the Father, and He taught us that the law is fulfilled in love (Matt. 22:37-40). He loved not merely in word, but in deed. He demonstrated God's love for us on the cross (Rom. 5:8). We should walk as He walked, with sacrificial love and obedience.

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**The gospel motivates us to love and obey God.**

## 1 John 2:5-6

"When God commands you to do something and you ignore it or go against it, John can only conclude one thing: You don't believe that God is love. And therefore you don't know him. For if you believed that God is love, then you would believe that all his commandments were the very best thing for you. And you would follow them. When you turn away from the commandments of God, you say in effect, a loving God wouldn't command me to do that. And so our disobedience displays our lack of trust in the love God has for us. And it shows that we do not know God."[5]

"Whoever thinks he understands the Scriptures, but does not love God and neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought."[6]

"Walking in the light involves honesty, obedience, and love; it also involves following the example of Christ and walking as He walked (1 John 2:6). Of course, nobody ever becomes a Christian by following Christ's example, but after we come into God's family, we are to look to Jesus Christ as the one great example of the kind of life we should live. This means "abiding in Christ." Christ is not only the Propitiation (or sacrifice) for our sins (1 John 2:2) and the Advocate who represents us before God (2:1), but He is also the perfect Pattern (He is "Jesus Christ the righteous") for our daily lives."[7]

### Activity

In your large group, come up with a list of biblical commands: loving our enemies, being patient, honoring our parents, exalting the Lord, etc. Next, have your students get into small groups. Assign each group one command from the list you made. They now have to create three scenes with that command:

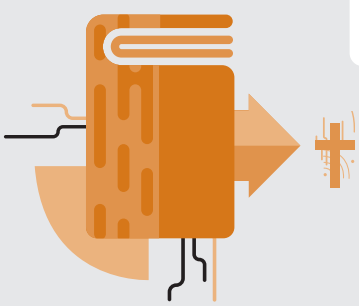
- In scene one, someone disobeys the command (all bad).
- In scene two, someone obeys the command, but from external motivation and not the love of God (good outward behavior, but bad inward heart).
- In scene three, someone obeys the command from an internal love for Jesus (all good).

Let them prepare and show their scenes. Which was hardest to do? Which was easiest? Is it better to be someone who obeys from wrong motives (because at least you are obeying), or to be someone who disobeys (because at least you are totally honest)? Which one were the Pharisees? How can we seek the Spirit's help to be sure we obey out of love for our good God, not to try to earn His favor or to avoid His wrath? How can we look to the cross to stir our hearts in appreciation for and love of God? If students feel safe doing so, ask them to share some areas where they are either not obeying God or where they are obeying with wrong motivations. Pray for one another to obey from proper motivations: gratitude to God, intimate knowledge of God, and love for God.

*5. John Piper, "Obedience Confirms Our Standing in God," Desiring God, February 17, 1985, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/obedience-confirms-our-standing-in-god.*
*6. Augustine quote by Matt Smethurst, Twitter post, July 28, 2020, 8:20 a.m., https://twitter.com/MattSmethurst/status/1288102095632191488*
*7. Warren W. Wiersbe (2013). Be Real. David C. Cook. Retrieved from https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com*

## (p. 65, DDG) Christ Connection

In teaching the church about the nature of obedience, the apostle John reminded the church that obeying Christ comes from knowing and loving Him. Loving obedience is best demonstrated by Jesus Himself, who obeyed the Father and laid down His life for others.



## OBEYING FROM LOVE

The gospel motivates us to love and obey God.

## JESUS CONNECTION

John reminded the Church that the more we know God, the more we love Him and want to obey Him. Loving obedience is best demonstrated by Jesus Himself, who obeyed the Father and laid down His life for others.

## LIFEWISE QUALITY

LOVE – Choosing to support and care for others whether or not they deserve it.

### HEAD

When we sin, who speaks with God on our behalf?

What does a true follower of Christ do?

## HEART

Jesus models love for us: love for God, love for others. How does Jesus' love encourage you to love God or others more?

Paul connects love and obedience. How does obeying God or others show that we love them? Does loving someone mean you have to do whatever he or she says?

## HANDS

No one always wants to do what we're asked to do. When it's difficult to obey, we can do it either out of obligation or out of love. Obligation acts with a bad attitude, half-hearted actions and grumbling words. Real love tries its hardest, chooses not to grumble and sees taking action as a way to please and encourage the one who asked. Jesus modeled real love for us, and we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us do what we're asked with the same love that He had. For each situation below, fill in the columns by describing what it would look like to do what was asked both ways.

| Situation | Obligation | Love |
|---|---|---|
| A relative has been sick and your friend tells you to call them to say hi. | | |
| A teacher lets you use her room to work on a project but asks you to clean up. | | |
| Your principal asks you to help another student with math, but he is often mean to you. | | |